

Accountability Assessment: San Diego Unified School Board



By Emily Irion and Elisabeth Earley

Abstract

The San Diego Unified School District is the second largest school district in California, serving over 121,000 students (San Diego Unified). On average their school board meets for regular business meetings 22 times a year, often approving millions of dollars to various items.

There is limited up-to-date research on the intricate workings of school boards, including their decision-making processes, accountability measures, and oversight mechanisms. This research explores the San Diego Unified School Board's decision-making processes through a comprehensive review of their public meetings, aiming to gain a better understanding of time allocated to fiscal items. Our goal is to provide a critical lens of the relationship between the available information for average citizens and fiscal oversight of the San Diego Unified school boards.



Theoretical Framework



Accountability

- Research shows (Howell, 2005) that concerned citizens use test scores as a measure of a schools academic performance to make their voting decisions for school board.



Fiscal Accountability

- By California law, all K-12 school boards are required to conduct an annual financial and compliance audit.
- These audits are necessary, but are they sufficient?

Can the everyday citizen play a role in providing fiscal accountability and oversight of their school board?

METHODOLOGY

TIME FRAME

Board Meetings from Sept 2021 – April 2023

VARIABLE

We identify time allocated to fiscal items as an indicator of the relationship between the available information for average citizens and fiscal accountability

ANALYSIS

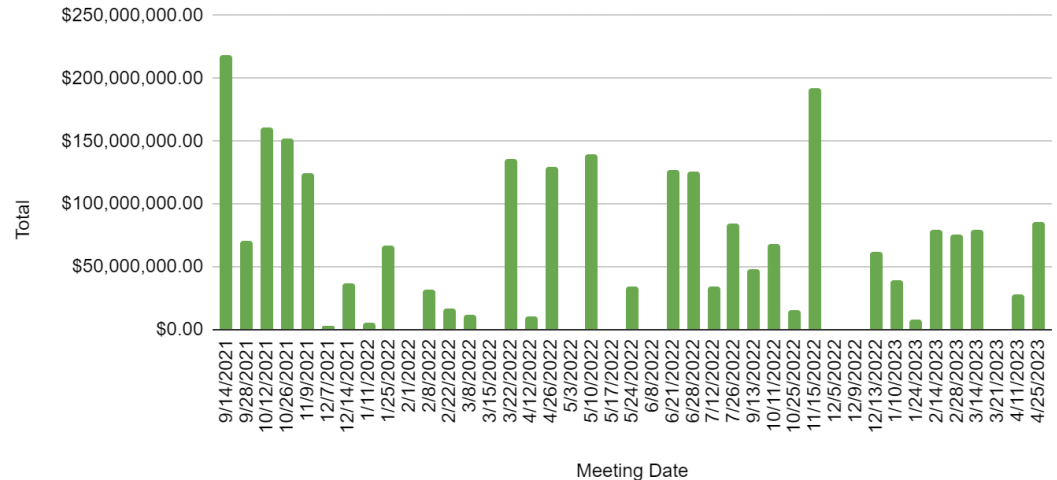
1. Compare time spent on fiscal items vs. non-fiscal items
2. Focus on Superintendent Consent Agenda - identify fiscal totals
3. Analyze board objections to items on Superintendent Consent Agenda

Preliminary Results



- Our findings show that of the 41 board meetings analyzed, the Superintendent Consent Agenda lists a wide range of items, from 16 to 81 items with between \$3 million and \$220 million of funds allocated to these items.
- On average the board spent between 45 seconds - 1 minutes and 30 seconds to approve Superintendent Consent Agenda, often without any public comments.

Reduced Sum of Superintendent's Consent Agenda over time





CONCLUSION

Hypothesis

This study measures time allocated to these fiscal items during public meetings as one way to measure the relationship between everyday citizens and the transparency and accountability between the board's decision making processes for fiscal items. Although financial audits are a necessary component to this process, they are insufficient. Additional transparency measures that are accessible to citizens should be considered.

Future Research

- Is public comment effective?
- Is the money spent impacting students?
- What do additional accountability measures look like? Are they accessible?

THANK YOU



By Emily Irion and Elisabeth Early